

The Builder.

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RELATING to the necessity of the case, we this week postpone our own observations which we have to re-

dores upon the same important subject; probing indeed in maturity of thought by greater extent of time for consideration of matters so vital; we, therefore, in order that all our readers may become fairly acquainted with and be able to judge accurately in the matter, continue the

Report of the Select Committee appointed to Inquire into the Circumstances affecting the Health of the Inhabitants of Large Towns and Populous Districts, &c.

Tax returns show that out of 5,692 cases of typhus in all the 20 unions, 4,002 were yielded by the seven unions specified as pre-eminently malarial districts.

Dr. Smith continues: "It appears that out of 77,000 persons who have received parochial relief, 14,000 have been attacked with fever; one-fifth part of the whole; and that 1,300 have died. It should be borne in mind that there is no disease which brings so much affliction on a poor man's family as fever; it commonly attacks the heads of the family, upon whose daily labour the subsistence of the family depends." The present returns afford melancholy evidence of the pauperising influence of this wide-spreading and mortal disease. They show that while one-fifth of the whole pauper population in the year in question was attacked with fever, in Bethnal-green the proportion was one-third, in White-chapel it was nearly one-half, and in St. George-the-Martyr it was 1,276 out of 1,467.

"Placing out of consideration (continues our benevolent informant) the suffering of the individual attacked with fever, which however is one of the most painful maladies to which the human being is subject; placing out of view also the distress brought upon all the members of the family of the sick, it is plain that this disease is one of the main causes of pressure upon the poor-rates. That pressure must continue, and the same large sums of money must be expended year after year for the support of families afflicted with fever, as long as those dreadful sources of fever which encompass the habitations of the poor are allowed to remain. They would not, they could not be allowed to remain, if their nature were really understood, and if the ease with which the most ardent of them might be removed were known.

"But there do not appear to be any practicable means of removing them without legislative interference; and if the care of the public health be a part of the duty of the legislature;—in the metropolis unions, which alone include a population of 851,000 souls, it be certain that conditions exist which are absolutely incompatible with the public health, and which conditions are to a very considerable extent removable; and if it shall be found that similar conditions exist in all the large towns in Great Britain, here would seem to be a proper and legitimate field for the exercise of legislative wisdom and power."

The prevalence of fevers and other diseases, is by no means confined to the populous

districts of the metropolis above described; but the same causes appear to produce the same effects, in a greater or less degree, in all our great towns. In some of them these evils, and the misery consequent upon them, is much increased by peculiar faults in the form and construction of the humble dwellings of the poorer classes. This seems owing to the want of all proper regulations in any general Building Act, applicable to the poorer class of houses in these crowded districts, for preserving due space and ventilation.

Thus in Liverpool there are upwards of 7,800 inhabited cellars, occupied by upwards of 39,000 persons, being one-fifth of all the working classes in that great town; and an account of undoubted veracity states, "that the great proportion of these inhabited cellars were dark, damp, confined, ill-ventilated, and dirty."

In Manchester also, nearly 15,000 persons, being almost 18 per cent. of the working population, live in cellars; and in the adjacent town of Salford, 3,300. Such a habitation must almost necessarily be unhealthy, as it implies the impracticability of proper drainage and ventilation.

Another form of construction of houses for the working classes, which your committee considers highly injurious to the health of the inmates, prevails extensively in many large towns, and especially in Liverpool; viz. the position of rows of small houses in close courts, built up at the sides and end, and having only one entrance, frequently under a narrow archway.

The evils arising from this cause are much increased when it is found, as in Liverpool, that it is combined with another error in the construction of rows of these houses, viz. that they are placed back to back, so as to exclude the possibility of thorough ventilation.

It has been stated to your committee, that there are in Liverpool about 2,400 courts, chiefly of this construction, containing an estimated population of about 95,000 of the working classes, in addition to 38,000 living in cellars. Independent of this faulty construction, so injurious to the health of the inhabitants, the state of most of these courts is described as almost utterly neglected, with no underground sewers, and no attention to cleansing, with an inspection of any kind, and the surface gutters frequently almost choked with filth.

These courts are thus described by Dr. Duncan, an intelligent physician resident at Liverpool:—"Very few have an entrance wider than four feet, and that is by an archway built over it; the width is from 9 to 15 feet between the rows; there is one only six feet. The backs of the houses in one court are built against the backs of houses in another court; at the farther end there is generally an ash pit between two privies; they are in the most abominable state of filth."

It is scarcely possible to conceive any construction more prejudicial to the health of the inhabitants.

"The stench arising from these courts is such, in some of the courts, as to render it almost impossible to remain for any time in them."

The great mortality of Liverpool is noticed, and a question is asked, "Do you know whether fevers have prevailed in Liverpool?" to which the answer is, "Yes, fever is the great complaint of these people."

"Does that arise in any measure from the want of ventilation and cleanliness in these dwellings?—A. There can be no doubt of that; I found fever most prevalent in those districts where there is most neglect of cleanliness and ventilation."

"Can you give any facts with respect to any particular localities where fever has been for a length of time, or where it frequently prevails?"

—A. I can state the average number of cases of fever attended annually by the dispensaries, and the proportion of those occurring in courts; the average number during the last five years was upwards of 5,000, exclusive of the cases occurring among the members of clubs and friendly societies, of which there are many in Liverpool; that is about one in 35 in all classes of the population; that in the courts is about two-fifths, and between one-half and one-quarter in the other classes."

It is also stated, "that in the courts of fever occurring among the inhabitants of

cellars is about 35 per cent. more than it ought to be, calculating the proportion of the inhabitants of the cellars to the whole population; the mortality of Liverpool was last year one in 33."

It appears that this kind of property is constantly increasing; is a very profitable and tempting investment; is the cause of great cost to the community, but contributes but little to the parochial burthen, as it is stated there are 16,800 cottages in the parish of Liverpool assessed under 182. per annum, and of that number only 900 contribute to the rates, and their contribution is 700l. on a levy of 10,000l.

Your committee would pause, from the sad statements they have been obliged to make, to observe, that it is painful to contemplate, in the midst of what appears an opulent, spirited, and flourishing community, such a vast multitude of our poor fellow-subjects, the instruments by whose hands these riches were created, condemned, for no fault of their own, to the evils so justly complained of, and placed in situations where it is almost impracticable for them to preserve health or decency of deportment, or to keep themselves and their children from moral and physical contamination; to require them to be clean, sober, cheerful, contented, under such circumstances would be a vain and unreasonable expectation. There is no Building Act to enforce the dwellings of these workmen being properly constructed; no Draining Act to enforce their being efficiently drained; no general or local regulation to enforce the commonest provisions for cleanliness and comfort.

It appears to your committee, that where such evils are found to follow from the neglect or inability in three respects of local authorities, that it is the duty of the legislature to take efficient steps to protect so numerous and valuable a portion of the community.

These evils, arising from the malconstruction and crowded state of their dwellings; the absence of a good system of sewerage, and all adequate inspection and cleansing of the courts and alleys in which they reside, are found to exist in like manner in many parts of the metropolis, in Manchester, Leeds, Bradford, Glasgow, and other large towns.

Thus, in Manchester, the capital as it may be called of the cotton trade, with a population of not less than 240,000, nearly 15,000 of the poorer inhabitants, constantly inhabit cellars. Though the habitations of the working classes are described as better than those of Liverpool, the want of proper building regulations, and any effectual sewerage and cleansing, as applicable to the localities inhabited by the workmen, is most justly complained of.

Your committee would here beg to quote a few lines from an able letter written by J. Robertson, Esq., an eminent surgeon, residing in Manchester, to the chairman. After addressing to the former disgraced state of the streets and drains, he bears testimony to the zeal of the authorities in carrying on salutary improvements in these respects, "especially when it is known that no street can be paved and sewered without the consent of the owners of property, unless a certain large proportion of the land on either side is built upon. Owing to this cause, several important streets remain to this hour disgraceful nuisances."

"Manchester," continues the writer, "has no Building Act, and hence, with the exception of certain central streets, over which the Police Act gives the commissioners power, such proprietor builds as he pleases. New cottages, with or without cellars, buddled together, row behind row, may be seen springing up in many parts. With such proceedings as those the authorities cannot interfere. A cottage row may be badly drained, the streets may be full of filth, trifling of stagnant water, the receptacles of dead dogs and rats, yet no one may find fault."

"The number of cellar-residences you have probably learned, from the papers published by the Manchester Statistical Society, is very great in all quarters of the town; and even in Blaine, a large portion of which consists of cottages recently erected, the same practice is continued. That it is so will must be obvious on the slightest consideration; for how can a hole under ground, of from 12 to 15 feet square, admit of ventilation, so as to fit it for a human habitation?" "We are so authorized in."

After remarking that, when well fed, the